

Women Airforces Service Pilots



Above: WASPS are taught the intricacies of caring for themselves by the proper handling of equipment in the high-altitude chamber at Randolph Field.

WASPS at New Castle Air Base in Delaware hoist their equipment as they leave their huge plane.

SIXTY million miles of air travel on behalf of the Army Air Forces was the impressive total achieved by more than a thousand young women who, though not militarized, donned uniforms for the nation's unique women pilot program.

Their service sometimes cost them their lives. Fatalities numbered 38 women.

The program was initiated with a three-fold purpose. In addition to providing women fliers who could take over certain jobs and thereby release their brothers for front-line duty, it was planned to serve as an experiment to see if women could serve as military pilots and, if so, to form the nucleus of an organization that could be rapidly expanded. Third point was to decrease the Air Forces' total demands on the cream of the manpower pool.

In using the program as an experiment, careful records were kept to determine the physical suitability and stability of women as pilots. Statistics proved that women were as efficient and effective as male pilots in most classes of duty.

Outside of the satisfaction of proving their ability as fliers, the women who took part in the pilot program proved of great value to their country. Flying almost every type of airplane used by the AAF, from the small primary trainer to the Superfortress and from the Thunderbolt to the C-54, they flew enough miles to reach around the world 2,500 times at the Equator. Their duties embraced ferrying, target towing, tracking and searchlight missions, radio control flying, simulated strafing, smoke laying, basic and instrument instruction, test flying, administrative and utility flying.

The WASP program, for as such the Women Airforces Service Pilots became known, was begun in August, 1943. However, women had been flying for their country months before; actually the WASP was a consolidation of two previous programs.

The original work of women pilots in the United States was activated in September of 1942 in two steps. One was the formation of an experimental squadron of experienced women pilots to do ferry work in the Air Transport Command, known as the WAFS, or Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron. The other step was the initiation of a training program for women pilots to provide all those which would be used except for the WAFS.



MISS JACQUELINE COCHRAN,
Director, Women Pilots Program

In charge of the ferry unit was Mrs. Nancy Harkness Love, an experienced licensed woman pilot. Miss Jacqueline Cochran, the noted flier, headed the training setup. The two programs were independent of each other until the formation of the WASP program nearly a year later to coordinate the work.

Miss Cochran was named director of women pilots and Mrs. Love became WASP executive with the staff of the ATC ferrying division, serving until December, 1944, when the WASP was inactivated.

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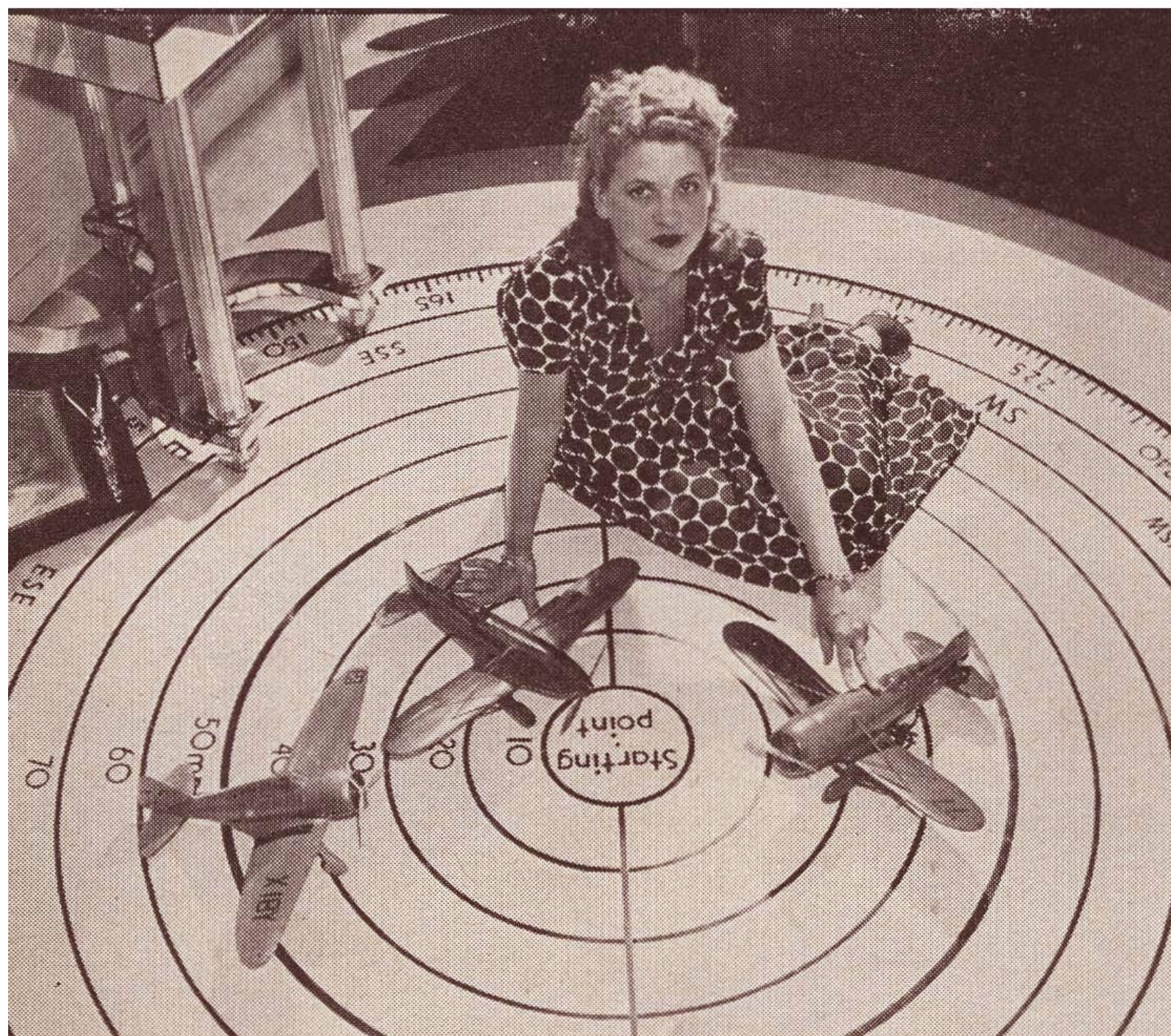
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Women Ferriers



Jacqueline Cochran used a compass design on the floor of her New York home as a setting in urging that U.S. girls be used as air ferry pilots

Britain's Air Transport Auxiliary, an unpublicized but important part of the RAF, is composed of noncombatant men and women fliers who ferry planes between factories and airfields. As a result of this service, military pilots are released for combat duty.

In the United States, this delivery service is handled by Air Corps pilots, who get additional training while flying new planes to airfields and the East Coast for transshipment to the British. But last week Col. Robert Olds, in charge of the Air Corps Ferrying Command, was making preparations for turning this service over to civilians in the event an emergency makes it necessary to withdraw military pilots. On July 2, Colonel Olds asked the Women Flyers of America, Inc., for the names of women pilots who have at least 200 hours and can put in full time as ferriers. The day before, Jacqueline Cochran had returned from flying a Lockheed Hudson bomber to Britain and predicted that 1,000 women pilots can be trained to handle any type of service plane in three months.

But while there are 2,250 licensed women pilots, 141 of whom have commercial ratings, indications are that the nation's reservoir of 48,000 private men fliers would first be tapped.